

CHRISTIANITY

BY

ANNIE BESANT

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THIS is a separate reprint of the fourth Convention lecture delivered on the Twenty-first Anniversary of The Theosophical Society, at Adyar, Madras, 1896, the President-Founder, Colonel H. S. Olcott in the Chair. The other three lectures were on Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. The "Foreword" was added when the lectures were printed in January 1897.

A second series of four lectures on Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, and Theosophy or the Divine Wisdom as the common source of all religions, were given at the Twenty-sixth Anniversary, 1901, Colonel Olcott again presiding.

A. A.

FOREWORD

THE following lectures do not pretend to be anything more than popular expositions of four great faiths, and are intended for the ordinary reader rather than for the student. Delivered to audiences composed almost entirely of Hindus, with only a sprinkling of Zoroastrians and Christians, they rather take for granted a knowledge of Sanskrit terms ; so notes have been added where obscurity might arise from their use. They are intended to help members of each of the four religions to recognize the value and beauty of the three faiths which are not their own, and demonstrate their underlying unity. In the lecture on Buddhism I had especially in mind the misconceptions which shut the Lord Buddha out from the hearts of His countrymen, and strove to remove them by quotations from the received Scriptures containing the authoritative records of His own words. For indeed I know of no

greater service that could be rendered to religion than to draw together again these sundered faiths, which almost divide between them the Eastern world. Mother and daughter they are, and family feuds are proverbially bitter ; yet might the quarrel be healed, if the desire for amity reigned on both sides. Less deeply rooted, but more bitter, was the antagonism to Christianity, exasperated by the ignorant and often coarse and abusive attacks levelled by the lower class of missionaries against the venerable faith held by nearly all my hearers. Yet they listened respectfully and after a while sympathetically to the exposition of the faith so young in comparison with their own, and finally recognized that it also was a great religion, and was not really alien from Hinduism. I can wish these lectures no better fate than that they may act as a message of peace to the hearts of their readers, as they evidently did to the hearts of their hearers.

The general principles underlying these lectures are the following : Each religion is looked at in the light of occult knowledge, both as regards its history and its teachings. While not despising the conclusions arrived at by the

patient and admirable work of European scholars, I have unhesitatingly flung them aside where they conflict with important facts preserved in occult history, whether in those imperishable records where all the past is still to be found in living pictures, or in ancient documents carefully stored up by Initiates and not wholly inaccessible. Especially is this the case with regard to the ages of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, touching which modern scholarship is ludicrously astray. That scholarship, however, will regard the occult view as being, in its turn, grotesquely wrong. Be it so. Occultism can wait to be justified by discoveries, as so many of its much-ridiculed statements as to antiquity have already been ; the earth is a faithful guardian, and as the archæologist uncovers the cities buried in her bosom many an unexpected witness will be found to justify the antiquity that is claimed.

Secondly, each religion is treated as coming from the one great Brotherhood, which is the steward and custodian of spiritual knowledge. Each is treated as an expression, by some member or messenger of that Brotherhood, of the eternal spiritual truths, an expression suited

to the needs of the time at which it was made, and of the dawning civilisation that it was intended to mould and to guide in its evolution. Each religion has its own mission in the world, is suited to the nations to whom it is given, and to the type of civilization it is to permeate, bringing it into line with the general evolution of the human family. The failure to see this leads to unjust criticism, for an ideally perfect religion would not be suitable to imperfect and partially evolved men, and environment must always be considered by the Wise when They plant a new slip of the ancient tree of wisdom.

Thirdly, an attempt is made to distinguish the essential from the non-essential in each religion, and to treat chiefly the former. For every religion in the course of time suffers from accretions due to ignorance not to wisdom, to blindness not to vision. Within the brief compass of these lectures, it was not possible to distinguish in detail, nor to point out all the numerous non-essentials. But the following tests may be used by any one who desires to guide himself practically in discriminating between the permanent and the

transitory elements in any religion. Is it ancient, to be found in the ancient Scriptures? Has it the authority of the Founder of the religion, or of the Sages to whom the formulation of the particular religion is due? Is it universal, found under some form in all religions? As regards spiritual truths, any one of these tests is sufficient. As to smaller matters, matters of rites and ceremonies, observances and customs, the use or disuse of any particular practice, we may ask as to each: Is it laid down or recommended in the ancient Scriptures, by the Founder or His immediate disciples? Can its usefulness be explained or verified by those in whom occult training has developed the inner faculties which make the invisible world a region they know by their own experience? If a custom be of modern growth, with only a century, or two or three centuries, behind it, if it be local, not found in any ancient Scripture, nor justified by occult knowledge, then—however helpful it may be found by any individual in his spiritual life—it should not be imposed on any member of a particular religion as binding on him as a part of that religion, nor should a man be looked at askance for

non-compliance with it. This fact especially needs enforcement in India, where customs that are entirely local, or very modern, are apt to be identified with Hinduism in the minds of their followers, and any Hindus who do not accept them are looked upon as somewhat inferior, even as unorthodox. Such customs, even if much valued and found useful by their adherents, should not be considered as generally binding, and should fall into the class of non-essentials. It has been well said that while in things essential there should be unity, in things non-essential there should be liberty, and in all things there should be charity. Were that wise rule followed by each, we should hear less of the religious antagonisms and sectarian disputes that bring shame on the very word "religion." That which ought to unite has been the ever-springing source of division, until many have impatiently shaken off all religion as being man's worst enemy, the introducer everywhere of strife and hatred.

May this little book, sent out with reverence for all religions that purify man's life, elevate his emotions, and comfort him in sorrow, be a message of peace, and not a stirring-up of

strife ; for I have striven to sketch each religion in its best, its purest, and most occult form, and each as though I belonged to it and were preaching it as my own. To the Theosophist "nothing that is human is foreign," and he has only reverent sympathy for every expression of man's longing after God. He seeks to understand all, to convert none, and in offering to share the knowledge with which he has been entrusted, he hopes to deepen every man's faith by adding to his faith knowledge, and by unveiling the common foundation which supports all religions.

Owing to pressure of time many quotations, supporting the positions taken, were either summarized or omitted in the spoken lectures. They have been inserted in their proper places, together with a few points that were in the original notes but were also omitted for lack of time.

ANNIE BESANT

ADYAR

January 3rd, 1897

CHRISTIANITY

BROTHERS :—In dealing this morning with the subject of Christianity, there are certain special difficulties which we did not have to face in speaking of the other three great religions with which we have been dealing on the last three mornings. These special difficulties arise from certain distinct causes. First, there is a certain historical obscurity affecting its origin, due to the struggles through which it passed in its early days, in a time when records were not carefully kept, and when an enormous mass of spurious documents under sacred names were put forward, at first blindly accepted and then gradually sifted out. The obscurity would not matter, as it can be quickly dissipated by the light of occult knowledge ; but if this be done, many present-day Christians would feel bitterly aggrieved, as though the essentials of their faith were being attacked. Our next great difficulty is the immense difference—or rather the immense differences—that

separate the Christians amongst themselves, so that whatever line one may take, one is likely to have some of the Christians saying that Christianity has been misrepresented, inasmuch as it has not been taken along their special line. For we have the Greek Church and the Roman Catholic Church, embracing a vast majority of the Christian population ; then we have a very large number of different churches and sects classed together under the title of " Protestants "—an awkward name to deal with, because it affirms nothing, but simply declares its protest against opinions held by other Christians. Hence in these three divisions, as I will call them for the moment, we find a great number of serious contradictions, and the student who desires to give a fair exposition and in no sense to misrepresent, finds himself in a whirlpool of conflicting statements, the acceptance of any one of which brings him into conflict with others. There is nothing, outside the Bible and the Apostles' Creed, that by the whole of the Christian world would be taken as a fair representation of Christian doctrine, and disputes as to meaning of these abound. The extraordinary importance

attached by all sections of the Christian world to the form of intellectual belief causes a bitterness of controversy unknown to other creeds, accuracy of belief being a far more stringent condition of membership in most of the churches than submission to any rule of conduct.

I propose to do here as I have done in dealing with the other religions—to take the Scriptures, the accepted Scriptures, of the whole religion and base my exposition upon them: I shall further use the documents of the early Church, the teachings of the “Fathers of the Church,” as they are called, as elucidating the Scriptures; and then, using the light of occultism, I shall try to disentangle what is essential from the non-essential, to disentangle that which is real and true from the accretions which have grown over it by lack of knowledge, and very often by the exigencies of controversies. One other great difficulty remains, and this is one which deals with the emotions rather than with the intellect. Christianity alone among the religions of the world claims to be unique; every other religion claims authority over its own adherents, and stands as it were on its

own ground, admitting the value of other religions and holding towards them, as a rule, a position of benevolent neutrality not of active opposition. But with regard to Christianity, this is not the case. Christianity claims to be the one revelation, the unique voice of God to a man. It permits no rivals on its platform ; it admits no brothers into its household ; it claims to stand by itself, alone, unapproachable, classing together all the other religions of the world as mistaken, sometimes under the contemptuous name of Heathen, sometimes rather more courteously but still in the same exclusive spirit. This, of course, stirs up angry feelings both on the one side and the other. The Christian propagandist insists on the supreme value of his own faith, and the small value of others ; while on the other hand the members of other faiths, resenting the assumption of superiority, feel moved to an opposition towards Christianity which they do not feel as regards the non-missionary faiths of the world. Especially in a country like this, those who do not belong to the Christian religion see what I cannot but call its worst side, its side of antagonism, very often accompanied, unfortunately,

by insult and outrage as regards the elder religions ; so that it is very difficult to gain your sympathetic understanding of what the religion really is in itself, for you have seen it under the most unfavourable aspect, on its militant rather than on its really religious side. I shall then have to ask you this morning to drop out of your minds, for the time, everything that has outraged your religious feelings, everything that may have roused in you emotions of antagonism, and to look on this religion as you more easily look upon others, as a way in which the Supreme is training a large number of His human family, as a religion that brings help and comfort and spiritual teaching to millions of the human race. If it suffers, as it often does, by the unwisdom of its militant representatives, try to forget that, and to look at the religion as a religion, and not as a proselytising agency.

Let us, with this preface—which in this country is a necessary introduction, if I am to win any sympathy at all for this, which is one of the great religions of the world—let us look at the authorities, and see what we have to deal with in the study of the religion, how far

we can understand the environment in which it gradually grew up, for without a study of that environment, you will never understand the latter presentation of the doctrines, you will never be able to realise the fashion in which it grew.

First of all, we have certain "canonical books," accepted equally by all divisions of Christendom, as to which there arises no challenge at all from Greek, Roman Catholic, or Protestant Churches. They all alike accept, without questioning, certain books, which are classed together under the names of the *Old* and *New Testaments*, together forming the *Bible*, as books which contain the divine revelation, anything contrary to which is regarded as heretical. The *Old Testaments*, the more ancient division of these canonical Scriptures, consists of a large number of different books, many of them historical, received from the Jewish, or the Hebrew, nation. Their writing extended over a long period of time, and the succession of books is marked by a very distinct growth from a comparatively barbarous condition—wherein the religion was narrow, filled with sacrifices of a peculiarly bloodthirsty

character—down to the later times when the Hebrew people, having largely come into touch with other civilisations, especially with those dominated by the religion of Zoroaster, took into their own faith a nobler, a grander conception of the divine Being, which you find expounded in the prophetic books ; these contain some most noble passages as regards the nature of God, and also as regards the righteousness which God demands from men. I shall refer presently to these more in detail, but will first finish the question of authorities. In the *Old Testament* we have further the *Psalms*, which are songs somewhat of the nature of the songs that we find in other religions, like those that are in the Vedas, like the Gāthās of the Zoroastrians ; some of them marked by the most elevated and noble spirit, some of them belonging to the earlier stage, exceedingly militant in their character and by no means always very good or high in their morality. We then come to the documents included under the title the *New Testament*. This consists of four Gospels, containing the life of the Founder of the religion, an account of the early Church, a number of epistles

written by His followers to the different sections of the infant Church, and a book of prophecies. There is comparatively little doctrine in the gospels themselves; certain doctrines may be deduced from them, but there is little authoritative statement; rather do you find a large number of ethical precepts, a large number of the teachings of the Christ, more of an ethical than of a philosophical character; then in the epistles are contained most of the dogmatic statements giving the outline of the doctrines of the faith. Outside this canon, selected from a mass of documents so far as the *New Testament* is concerned, we have what are called apocryphal Scriptures. The apocryphal Scriptures of the Jews are distinctly remarkable works, one of them especially, the *Book of Wisdom*, being a document of rare beauty and shewing great spirituality. These are more thoroughly accepted by the Roman Catholics than they are by the Protestant Churches. In the Roman Catholic *Bibles* they are generally bound between the *Old* and *New Testaments*, whereas in the majority of Protestant *Bibles*, they are dropped out as non-canonical. Next we have a

mass of apocrypha in connection with the early Church, the gospels of Mary, of Peter, of James and so on—stories of the Infancy of Jesus, stories of His later life, stories of His descent into hell, of His work in the invisible world—a mass of writings, very many of them exceedingly interesting, as shewing the literature of primitive Christianity, interesting and instructive for the student, and necessary to be studied, if he would know what I may call the intellectual environment of the early Church. These are never bound up with the book called the *Bible*; they form a great mass of literature, a very large number of documents, which a student ought to read, if he desires to understand early Christianity at all. Lastly, we have an immense literature, that of the fathers, of the bishops, of the teachers, of the early Church, running especially over the latter part of the second through the third, fourth, and fifth centuries—once more a mass of voluminous literature, without a knowledge of which no one is competent to pass an opinion upon Christian doctrine, nor to stand up as a teacher or an exponent of Christianity. This literature was written by most learned

men, men of whom many have been sainted by the later Church, like S. Clement of Alexandria, S. Irenæus, and many others. These are documents of enormous value in understanding the growth of Christianity, and it is very largely due to the utter carelessness of the Protestant Churches regarding them, and the dense ignorance of their contents which as a rule you find among the less-instructed Protestant clergy, that Christianity is often presented in so crude, so narrow, and so unphilosophical an aspect, that many of the educated reject it because it seems to them to be irrational. If the Protestant Churches studied this literature, as Roman Catholics most certainly do, they would have much more hold than they have to-day on the cultured intellect of Europe, for you have in these documents the philosophic, the metaphysical, basis of Christianity. Yet, if you go outside the Church of England, where do you find many learned Protestant clergy thoroughly conversant with these documents? If you go into the dissenting Churches, you very rarely come across a minister who has studied them in any fashion, and so you get that peculiar class who echo the

statement that the "*Bible*, and the *Bible* alone, is the religion of Protestants." The result of this is a most unphilosophical form of Christianity, unfairly discrediting it in the minds of the thinking, the intellectual, and the philosophic few. With regard to the oral traditions—for they are largely oral traditions that you find in the four Gospels that contain the life of the Founder—these were selected rather late in the second century, and were put together under the names of four of the great apostles of the Church. That they were selected from many other documents is clear from the preamble to the third Gospel, in which the writer begins by saying: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed amongst us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order," and so he also writes his gospel. Now that is an important point, as shewing you the way in which these accounts were written. First, from mouth to mouth

the story spread. In Christianity, as in other religions, there was an immense mass of oral tradition handed from mouth to mouth and uncommitted to writing. Many of the sacred teachings were never written down at all, as we shall find from the testimony of some of the fathers of the Church ; the creed which every Christian was taught to recite was not written but was only taught by word of mouth, to be used as a sign of recognition of a certain status in the Church. That period of oral teaching is of considerable importance, and its existence is further proved by the quotations of the sayings of Jesus given in the earliest fathers, by men like Justin Martyr, Ignatius, the Shepherd of Hermas, and others, who quote as the sayings of the Lord sentences which are not to be found in the canonical gospels at all, but which are found in the so-called apocrypha. The canonical are selections from a larger tradition, put together at a later date. We shall have to glance at Clement of Alexandria, one of the greatest fathers of the Church, at Tertullian, at Origen, who have left voluminous writings, helping us to see in detail the condition of the Church in their

times; and these we shall rely upon to establish certain fundamental positions, without which you will do injustice to Christianity, as so many of its own adherents do it injustice to-day.

First amongst these preliminary positions comes the division of Christian teaching into two parts—the revealed and the unrevealed, the exoteric and the esoteric doctrines. This division existed among the Hebrews, who so much influenced the earlier tradition of Christianity, and who had the secret system known under the name of the *Kabalah*. I am not going to speak upon it now, although that also should be known by the earnest student of Christianity. But I want to draw your attention to certain statements of the Christ to his apostles, and of the earlier teachers, which prove, beyond the possibility of challenge, the existence of hidden or esoteric teaching, the loss of which in some parts of the Church explains very largely the crude statements that we now hear made as to God and as to the human soul. First of all let us take one or two statements of the Christ Himself as regards the fashion of His own teaching. There

comes in the fore-front of it His declaration to His apostles: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables."¹ Origen commented on this declaration of the Christ as follows: "I have not yet spoken of the observance of all that is written in the Gospels, each one of which contains much doctrine difficult to be understood, not merely by the multitude, but even by certain of the more intelligent, including a very profound explanation of the parables which Jesus delivered to 'those without,' while reserving the exhibition of their full meaning for those who had passed beyond the stage of exoteric teaching, and who came to him privately in the house. And when he comes to understand it, he will admire the reason why some are said to be 'without' and others 'in the house.'"² Thus Origen draws a distinction between those that are without, the unlettered, the unlearned, multitude, who could

¹ S. Mark, iv, 11.

² *Contra Celsum*, XXI. Not having the Fathers at hand, I have availed myself for the quotations from them of Mr. A. M. Glass' excellent series of articles in *Lucifer*, on "Christianity and its Teachings."

only be taught the elements of truth by way of parables, and those who were within the house, apostles and disciples, to whom the word of God was revealed in its entirety, the mysteries of the kingdom which were not given at all to the outer world. Then again we find Jesus saying to his disciples words that admit of no misconception: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet."¹ The meaning of the word "dogs" is known to us, not only from its use by Jewish historians, but from the lips of Jesus Himself. The word was used to describe every nation that was not of the seed of Abraham. And we find that when a Syro-Phoenician woman came to Jesus and asked Him to exercise His miraculous power, His first answer was: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." She meekly accepted the title and replied: "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."² So that the meaning of the word "dog" is by no means in dispute; it means those who are

¹ S. Matthew, vii, 6.

² S. Matthew, xv, 26, 27.

not within the limits of the kingdoms of God. So the early fathers understood the meaning and obeyed it. They used exactly the same policy. Clement of Alexandria, quoting these very words, says that it is difficult to teach "swinish and untrained hearers."¹ So again Jesus says to His disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."² According to the traditions of the fathers, He remained on earth after His resurrection for eleven years, teaching His apostles the secret things. S. Clement says of this sacred knowledge: "It was spoken from the beginning to those only who understood. Now that the Saviour has taught the Apostles the unwritten rendering of the written [Scriptures] has been handed down also to us."³ According to the *Acts* He only remained for forty days, but during these forty days He instructed them as to the things of the kingdom of God,⁴ and those instructions remained unrecorded. There is no trace of them in the canonical Scriptures of the Church. In fact, Origen observes on this very fact, that

¹ *Stromata*, I, xii.

² *S. John*, xvi, 12.

³ *Stromata*, vi, xv.

⁴ *Acts*, i, 3.

Jesus "conversed with His disciples in private, and especially in their secret retreats, concerning the gospel of God; but the words which He uttered have not been preserved."¹ Just in the same way do we find Saint Paul speaking. He tells his converts of the Church of Corinth: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ."² Again: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom,"³ and "we speak wisdom amongst them that are perfect:"⁴ not amongst the generality but amongst the perfect, a name which is well recognised in its technical meaning—from the statements in the fathers—those who have been initiated into the mysteries and are therefore the perfected within the Church. I might quote other texts, but these may suffice, and we will turn to the practice of the Church, as shewn in the fathers. Clement of Alexandria states that in his writings he only intended to recall to his readers truth they had received more fully in oral exposition: "The

¹ *Contra Celsum*, VI, vi.

² *1 Corinthians*, iii, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, ii, 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ii, 6.

writing of these memoranda of mine, I well know, is weak, when compared with that spirit, full of grace, which I was privileged to hear. But it will be an image to recall the archetype to him who was struck with the Thyrsus,"¹ a phrase every occultist will understand. "It is not to be wished," he writes, "that all things should be exposed indiscriminately to all and sundry, or the benefits of wisdom communicated to those who have not, even in a dream, been purified in soul (for it is not allowed to hand to every chance-comer what has been procured with such laborious efforts); nor are the mysteries of the Word to be expounded to the profane."² When Celsus assailed Christianity as a secret system, Origen answered: "To speak of the Christian doctrine as a *secret* system is altogether absurd. But that there should be certain doctrines not made known to the multitude, which are [revealed] after the exoteric ones have been taught, is not a peculiarity of Christianity alone, but also of philosophic systems, in which certain truths are exoteric and others esoteric."³ In order to

¹ *Stromata*, I, i.

² *Ibid.*, V, ix.

³ *Contra Celsum*, I, vii.

preserve due order, Christian converts were led successively through different stages; at first they were hearers, then catechumens, and then, receiving baptism, they became full members of the church. Within the church itself were also grades; first came the general members; out of these, the pure in life went on into a second grade; "whoever is pure, not only from all defilement, but from what are regarded as lesser transgressions, let him be boldly initiated in the mysteries of Jesus, which properly are made known only to the holy and the pure . . . He who acts as initiator, according to the precepts of Jesus, will say to those who have been purified in heart: 'He whose soul has, for a long time, been conscious of no evil, and especially since he yielded himself to the healing of the word, let such a one hear the doctrines which were spoken in private by Jesus to his genuine disciples.'"¹ These were the "few chosen" out of the many who were "called," and beyond these were still "the chosen of the chosen," with "perfect knowledge," and who "lived in perfection of righteousness according to the

¹ *Contra Celsum*, III, lx.

gospel.”¹ Tertullian complains of the heretics that they did not preserve this order, but treated everyone equally: “To begin with it is doubtful who is a catechumen and who a believer; they have all access alike, they hear alike, they pray alike—even heathens, if any such happen to come among them. ‘That which is holy they will cast to the dogs, and their pearls, although’ (to be sure) they are not real ones, ‘they will fling to the swine.’”²

Part of this teaching, at least, concerned the true meaning of the Scriptures, which were by no means accepted as mere historical and ethical documents as they are to-day. Origen explains—and his statements are especially valuable, since he is stated by Socrates to have been an “expositor of the mystical tradition of the Church”³—that Scripture is three-fold in meaning: the “flesh” for simple men; the “soul” for the more instructed; the “spirit” for the “perfect,” and he quotes the already mentioned words of S. Paul as to the “wisdom of God in a mystery.” The histories are the “flesh,” and are very useful to the simple and

¹ *Stromata*.

² *De Præscriptione Hæreticorum*, xli.

³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, v.

ignorant, but often absurdities are introduced in order to show that there is a hidden meaning, and the gospels "do not contain throughout a pure history of events, which are interwoven, indeed, according to the letter, but which did not actually occur." "The gospels themselves are filled with the same kind of narratives; *e.g.*, the devil leading Jesus up into a high mountain... and the attentive reader may notice in the gospels innumerable other passages like these, so that he will be convinced that in the histories that are literally recorded, circumstances that did not occur are inserted."¹ Some hints are given by various fathers as to their methods of scriptural interpretation, and it is evident that a very complete system existed, one of the keys, at least, being numerical. But we have not time to follow this attractive bye-way.

Enough for our purpose to shew that Christianity, like other great religions, had its secret teaching, confined to the few. This was lost, for the most part, in the flood of ignorance which swept over Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, and the crude interpretation,

¹ *De Principiis*, IV, i.

the teaching for the multitude, replaced the spiritual truths known to the few. A few fragments survived, in the custody of the Greek and Latin Churches, and symbols and ceremonies still tell of their original presence, but as a systematic teaching they disappear, leaving Christianity shorn of its strength. Too often now, teaching is condemned by Protestants unless it is teaching which the most ignorant, the most unlearned, the most childish, can understand; and the result of this policy in Protestant countries is that while the Churches keep hold of the ignorant, they lose their hold upon the more learned; for the presentation of God and of nature that satisfies the mind of the child, that satisfies the mind of men utterly unphilosophical and uncultured, must ever be a representation that repels the mind of the philosopher, whose wider and deeper faculties demand something more than that which satisfies the dawning faculties of the other. In this way Christianity has become weakened, in this way scepticism has largely developed, and we find men throwing aside the whole of Christianity, because the presentment made to them is utterly unworthy

of intellectual apprehension, and because it contradicts the plainest facts of science.

Let us now hastily trace the religious evolution of the Hebrew nation, in order that we may understand the place in it of the Founder of Christianity, the conception of God current in His time, and also the changes through which that conception had passed. In the earliest books of the Hebrew Scriptures we have a very limited conception of God, and however true they may be as regards the lower Gods, comparatively narrow in their individuality, and limited in their power as all the lower Gods must necessarily be, some of the ideas are utterly revolting when they are applied to the Supreme Deity, and are given as descriptions of the one God, the Supreme LOGOS, He who presides over the universe, the Life and Supporter of all. I need only remind you in passing, of many statements, such as the way in which this limited representative of the divine came down to walk in the garden of Eden, came down to upset the builders of the tower of Babel, and so on, for you to realise at once that you are face to face with the lower divine entities and not with the LOGOS.

But let us pass on from those, with all the bloody sacrifices that surrounded them, and take the nobler conceptions of the prophets, which moulded the later views adopted in the Christian Church. Here you find an idea of God which is lofty and pure in character. He is essentially holy, the Holy One of Israel; He is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;"¹ He is "God the Lord, He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; He that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein."² He is the one, the only God: "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and besides me there is no saviour."³ In connection with this nobler view of God, we can see many traces of the influence upon the Hebrew captives of the Zoroastrian belief.

Their ideas before and after the captivity are entirely different. There is also a demand

¹ *Isaiah*, lvii, 15.

² *Ibid.*, xlii, 5.

³ *Ibid.*, xliii, 10, 11.

for righteousness, for purity, a contempt for outward observances when they were not connected with inner nobility of character, a contempt which is sometimes even fierce in its expression, as though there were over-mastering indignation at the idea that any would dare to offer to a holy God the mere outer ceremonies, instead of a righteous and noble life. Take for instance that very strong passage that you find in the prophet Amos : " I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them ; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."¹ That is the spirit of the later prophets. You may take another example from Isaiah, where the people are complaining that though they fast, God has not listened to them, that they have afflicted their bodies and their souls and He takes no notice ; and then the answer comes thundering as from Sinai :

¹ Amos v, 21—24.

"Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the hands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward."¹ There is the moral side coming out, as it comes out over and over again in these prophets. Only one other quotation will I give you, to show the mental environment, as it were, in which Jesus was born, and that is a word from the prophet Micah, which sums up human duty.

¹ *Isaiah* lviii, 4—8.

The prophet asks himself how he shall please God and what he shall do: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"¹ That is the strong and sound morality that you find coming out in these later Jewish teachers, and it was in a nation that to some extent, at least, was influenced by that teaching that Jesus was born.

Now in looking for a few moments at that figure which has fascinated so many hearts, round which the love and adoration of generation after generation of the western world have twined, let us try to realise the work that He had to do, the mission He was intended to fulfil. A new civilisation was to be born, a new departure in the life of the world; young

¹ *Micah*, vi, 6—8.

nations, full of vigour, of energy, with the metaphysical intellect less developed than the more practical side of the mind, were coming to the front, and were gradually to assume the reins of the destinies of the world. A strong and vigorous race, full of vitality, full of strength, full of practical ability, this was the type from which the nations of Europe were to be born, this was the nation, the race rather, whose religious training was the problem before the great Brotherhood, the guardians of the spiritual evolution of man. For that training another proclamation of the old truth was wanted; for the training and moulding of that new-dawning civilisation again the old truths must be spoken by a messenger of that mighty Brotherhood. This also must be trained as others had been trained, and with a training suitable to its characteristics. Hence you find in Christianity comparatively little declaration by the Christ of subtle metaphysic, much of ethic, much noble morality, much spiritual teaching of a practical kind, little—in fact next to nothing—of the science of the soul. That was reserved for the esoteric teaching, confined to His immediate disciples. Looking,

as it were, over the district in which this religion was to begin, for a fit instrument and messenger of the Brotherhood, They chose one—a young man already marked out by a marvellous purity and by a profound devotion, Jesus, known later as the Christ. His mission began at that point of His life described in the gospels as His baptism, when He was about the age of thirty. At that period, as you may read in the gospels, the Spirit of God came down upon Him, and he was proclaimed by a voice from heaven as the Son of God, to whom people were to listen.¹ On that phrase 'Son of God,' I shall speak in a moment, when we come to deal with the challenge of the Jews to His claim to that position. It is enough for us to recognise that, according to the view put forward in the story of His life, His ministry began when He was thirty years of age, when this special manifestation took place. From the occult standpoint, that is the allegorical way in which the choosing of this young man to be the messenger of the divine teaching is described, and represents the giving to Him of the

¹ *S. Matthew*, iii, 16, 17.

illumination which made Him fit to be a divine Teacher of men. For three years only He led a teacher's life, a life beautiful in its purity, radiant with love, with compassion, with all the tenderest qualities of the human heart. We see Him wandering over the land of Palestine, raising the dead (as they were called) healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind : miracles, men call these healings. But there is in them nothing surprising to the occultist, for he is familiar with such actions, he knows the powers by which they are done. For never yet has a great Teacher come to earth, one in whom the power of the Spirit was developed, who was not a master over physical nature, nature being subject to him, and obedient to his will. These so-called miracles are nothing but the use of certain hidden powers of nature to bring about certain external results ; these miracles of healing, of restoring the sight of the blind, and so on, were worked both long before the Christ was born, and have been repeated by many, years upon years afterwards, and so lightly did the Christ Himself hold them that when He spoke of them to His disciples He said : " Greater works than these shall ye do,

because I go unto my Father."¹ He left it as the mark of the men who had real faith, living faith, in Him, that they should be able to take up serpents, and to drink poison without injury²—as a mark belonging to all Initiates who choose to exercise the power, and the absence of which, at least in some sections of the Church, shows that they have lost that living faith of which their own Master laid down these powers as the outward symbol and expression.

The life of Jesus, as I said, is a beautiful life. Listen to His teachings, and there you will get His spirit, so different alas! from the spirit which is often shewn by those who bear His name. These teachings are exactly at one with the precepts of the great spiritual teachers who preceded Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."³ There is the occult truth which He again proclaimed, that only by purity can the Pure be seen, only by the purified can God be known. See how He enforces the teaching familiar to you, that

¹ *S. John*, xiv, 12.

² *S. Mark*, xvi, 17, 18.

³ *S. Matthew*, v, 8

thought is more important than action, that thought when it is performed is action practically done. "Whosoever," He said, "looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."¹ Take again that teaching so familiar in the teaching of Manu, Zoroaster and the Buddha: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."² See the occult statement, which probably few but occultists will understand: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness."³

Listen to His proclamation once more of that ancient, narrow path—the path that you

¹ *S. Matthew*, v, 28.

² *Ibid.*, 44, 45.

³ *Ibid.*, vi, 22, 23.

know as sharp as the edge of the razor: "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."¹ Hear His words to the multitude, breathing out that divine compassion, which is the very birth-mark of everyone who comes from the great Brotherhood, from the great White Lodge: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."² See Him checking the disciples, as they tried to push away the mothers who brought their children to Him that He might bless them: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."³ And once He took a little child and set him in the midst as example to His disciples of humility and submission. Take this sterner teaching, exactly again on the line of the ancient occult teaching, which says that attachment to

¹ *S. Matthew*, vii, 14.

² *Ibid.*, xi, 28—30.

³ *Ibid.*, xix, 14

the things of the earth is fatal to progress in the life of the spirit. When a young man goes to Him and asks how eternal life may be won, His first answer is the exoteric answer: "Keep the commandments." The answer of the young man is: "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Then comes the sterner demand: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." The young man "went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." And then the occult Teacher enforces the teaching on His disciples: "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."¹

In this way then He taught the same ancient morality, the teaching so familiar to us all, the teaching of the ancient Founders of all religions. We trace another likeness to His predecessors in the teaching by parables; always a parable was on His lips when He was speaking to the multitude. Parable after

¹ *S. Matthew*, xix, 16—24.

parable He spake, each one containing some gem of spiritual truth. Perhaps the one that has most held the heart of Christendom, and to which men's heart have ever since answered because of its beauty and its tenderness, is that of the lost sheep, lost in the wilderness, for which the shepherd goes out and searches diligently till he finds it; "and when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."¹ The "Good Shepherd" is one of the favourite names of Christ throughout Christendom, and you may see Him in pictures, you may see Him in the painted windows of churches and cathedrals, drawn as "the Good Shepherd," with the lost lamb on His shoulder, which He has found and is bringing home rejoicing to the fold where the other sheep are kept. His doctrine of the "Kingdom of God," has been

¹ *S. Luke*, xv, 3—7.

much perverted but was well understood in the early Church ; it was a kingdom into which men were invited, and in which the stages were clearly marked. Men must be pure ere they were allowed to enter ; they must have faith ; that is a necessity, ere they can come into it ; they must add to their faith knowledge, otherwise they cannot reach its higher grades ; wisdom must follow knowledge, otherwise they remain imperfect ; to all such immortality was promised—the conquest over death, the going out no more ; for as we shall see presently, the Christian Religion in the early days taught the ancient doctrine of Reincarnation ; hence there came a time when death was overcome and men went out no more from the Temple of God, when they had become perfect, masters of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Thus in teaching, in healing, in helping all who were in need, Jesus passed three brief years. He “went about doing good,” is the summary of His life given by S. Peter.¹ Very short was His life, and why ?

Because of the people to whom he came to bring the message of the Brotherhood : going

¹ Acts x, 38.

to such a people, fierce, fanatical, harsh and bigoted in their own religion, there could be but one result—the putting into action of their stern law of blasphemy, His slaying by hatred and by malice. Sometimes men ask to-day: Why do the Masters remain hidden, why do They stay behind the veil and refuse to show Themselves in the haunts of men? Because until men re-learn the ancient veneration, which made the messenger of the Gods a sacred person, and surrounded Him with love, with reverence, with worship, the Masters of Wisdom come not forth to stimulate the angry passions of men by jealousy of Their purity, by hatred of Their spiritual lives; the Christ was the last of these great messengers sent to the world, and they to whom He came slew Him when three years of public life were over; they hated Him for a purity that seemed to them as an insult offered to their own impurity, and for a greatness that was a reproach to their littleness.

We now come to the struggles of the early Church. The gospel of love and of compassion spread swiftly amongst the poor, more slowly amongst the highly educated, by means

of esoteric teaching; and we see a great effort made by the Brotherhood during the first three centuries after Christ. There was a struggle between learning and ignorance, a struggle between knowledge and superstition. It raged strongly and fiercely, having for its chief centre Alexandria, for its combatants the Gnostics on one side, the mass of Christians on the other. As you trace the story you find great Gnostic teachers, endeavouring to introduce the wisdom of the East under new names into this latest religion, intended for its modern vessel. The great Valentinus wrote his apocalypse of wisdom, the *Pistis Sophia*, the greatest treasure of ancient Christian occultism, now made known to the English-speaking world by the translation of Mr. G. R. S. Mead, the Secretary of the European Section of our Theosophical Society. Mr. Mead writes in his Introduction: "Let us then consider the movement about the year 150 A. D. By that time the original Logia or the Urevangelium of Christianity had disappeared, and the Synoptic Gospels were all set in the framework of the traditional life of the great Master of the Faith. The popular tidal wave of the

new religion had come exclusively from the ocean of Jewish tradition, and was engulfing a more universal view of Christianity in the same flood of intolerance and exclusiveness which had characterised the Hebrew nation throughout the whole of its previous history. This startling phenomenon was now attracting the attention of minds which were not only skilled in the philosophy of the schools, but also imbued with the eclectic spirit of a universal theosophy and a knowledge of the inner doctrines of the ancient religions. Such men thought that they saw in the Christian Gospel a similarity of doctrine and a universalism which was consanguineous with these inner teachings of the ancient faiths, and set to work to endeavour to check the exclusive and narrowing tendencies which they saw so rapidly developing among the less instructed, who made faith superior to knowledge, even to such an extent as to openly condemn every other form of religion and scoff at all philosophy and education."¹

The struggle raged between these men and the masses, led indeed by some wise and

¹ *Pistis Sophia*, p. xxiii.

deeply-instructed men, and it ended in the success of the unlearned multitude and in the casting out of the Church of the more learned and more philosophical Gnostics, who have ever since remained under the ban of heresy. The Church emerged from this struggle with enough of true religion left for training and elevating the heart, but not enough for justifying to the intellect the wisdom of the ages. It brought out of the struggle its devotion to the personal Christ, the man-God who was the object of its most passionate and most fervent worship. In that revelation of the Divine, there was, as I say, everything that was wanted for the heart; alas! there was not enough for the subjugation of the intellect, for the training of the philosophic mind. The result was that the Dark Ages came down upon Europe, the Dark Ages as they are rightly and fitly called in history, and the esoteric knowledge of the early Church disappeared; the fathers even were well nigh forgotten, save in the monasteries, where they still were studied, and hence now and then the Roman Catholic Church gave doctors and metaphysicians to the world.

We can see how, during this time of darkness, doctrines were twisted and distorted, and how some of them became revolting alike to reason and to conscience in the form in which they were presented. We come down to the time of the Protestant Reformation, when the terrible views of Calvin and the slightly more liberal views of Luther dominated the reforming party, and from them was evolved modern Protestantism, in its least crude form in the Church of England, ever largely influenced by Roman Catholic doctrines. Now, within the bosom of this Church itself, a nobler school is growing up, more liberal in its thinking, more charitable in its views of others, and we may hope that this will redeem later Christianity, and give it its rightful place amongst the religions of the world.

We must pass from this to the doctrines of Christianity and glance at them as fully as our time admits. The Trinity—of that there is curiously little said in the *Bible*; in the *Old Testament* there is nothing at all, although the Jews had the doctrine in their secret teaching, the *Kabalah*; in the *New Testament* there is little said of it, and the most precise statement

is challenged—or rather, is omitted—by the latest revisers of the *Bible*. This statement is very definite: "There are three that bear record in Heaven—the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost: and these three are One."¹ The Revisers regarded this as a monkish gloss that had crept into the book later in the history of the Christian Church, and omitted it. That is the only text on which the doctrine can absolutely rely. There is a phrase at the end of the Gospel of S. Matthew as to baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," but that also has been challenged by criticism, though not rejected by the Revisers. There was in the early Church a struggle over the doctrine, which is complicated by the deification of Jesus into the Second Person, but ultimately it emerged from the struggle in a form recognisable as the ancient doctrine: the Father, existence, the source of all life; the Son begotten by, emanated from, Him, dual in His nature, God and man—with that mark of duality which is always the mark of the second Logos, or the second Person in the Trinity—by whom the

¹ *I John*, v, 7, old version.

worlds were made, and without whom nothing can be made in the manifested universe ; more indefinitely the Third Person—the Holy Spirit, the Universal Mind, or Wisdom. As I say, there was a struggle in the Church. Some contested the doctrine of the Trinity ; others maintained it ; and finally the ancient doctrine emerged triumphantly from the struggle and became the orthodox doctrine of the Church. It was then authoritatively declared in the “Athanasian Creed,” and, despite some of its clauses which are objectionable, that creed gives one of the best expositions of the metaphysic of the doctrine which is extant in Christianity. I recall it because there is dimly and vaguely suggested in it something behind the Trinity, also hinted at here and there in the course of the Christian Scriptures. The Divine Substance is said to be one. Believers are warned that as they must not confound the Persons of the Trinity, so neither must they divide the Substance, the unity which underlies the Three, the unity of which the Three are only the manifestations. A Roman Catholic theologian points out that the word Person comes from *persona*, a “mask ;” and

this must imply that behind the mask there is the unrevealed Reality, the hidden God, who is not known. There is a suggestion of this Unknown in the verse in Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God?"¹ More than once in the book of Job this question is suggested of the Unknowable, the unrevealed God, unrevealed in His nature and in His essence. Then coming downwards from the Trinity we have the seven Spirits before the throne of God.² These are the seven great Gods of the Elements, familiar to us in Hinduism so far as five of them are concerned—the five Gods of the five manifested elements; here the whole seven are mentioned. Then we have, as lower Gods, all the Archangels and Angels, those of whom S. Paul speaks as angels, principalities and powers;³ of these there are nine orders: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. Very interesting in this connection is the statement of S. Ignatius, a bishop of the Apostolic Church,

¹ Job, xi, 7.

² Revelation, iv, 5.

³ Romans, viii, 38.

that he was not yet "able to understand heavenly things; as the places of the angels, and the several companies of them, under their respective princes."¹ In the Roman Catholic Church there is, quite rightly, the worship of Angels, the worship, that is, of the lower Gods, who have to do immediately with man and with all the manifestations of nature.

Coming next to the important question of man's nature and of his relation to God, let us take it as taught in the Scriptures themselves, unhappily not always found in the teachings of the modern Church. S. Paul describes man as triple in his nature—spirit, soul and body,² a distinction being made between spirit and soul that has dropped out of popular teaching altogether, wherein the spirit and soul are identified and so the whole of the evolution of man is confused: The spirit is divine; "Know ye not," said S. Paul, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you."³ Exactly the same form of words is

¹ *Trallians*, 5.

² *1 Thessalonians*, v. 23.

³ *1 Corinthians*, iii, 16.

here used with which we are so familiar in Hindu literature, where we find the human body spoken of as Vishnupura, Brahmapura—the town or city of Brahma or of Vishnu. Here S. Paul, himself an Initiate, speaks of the human body as God's temple, of the spirit of God as dwelling within it. And then—this is the passage that I had in my mind when I said I would allude to the Sonship of the Christ which was proclaimed at His baptism—I find the Jews assailing Jesus because He claimed to be the Son of God; His defence is a remarkable one; He does not say, as a modern Christian might say for Him: "Yes, I am the Son of God, as no other man can be;" on the contrary He founds his claim to divine Sonship on the divinity which is inherent in the nature of man himself. Listen to His words, and see how clear, how definite they are. He refers the Jews to their own Scriptures. "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? if he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I

am the Son of God?"¹ There is Christ's own defence of His sonship: "All men are Gods, according to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures cannot be broken; therefore there is no blasphemy in my claim, when I call myself also the Son of God." Then take that beautiful prayer just ere he goes to His crucifixion. He is praying to His Father about the future of His Church. He speaks to God of Their unity, that He is one with Him, and He goes on to pray that "they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."² There is the declaration of the unity of man with God. There is the proclamation in this religion also of man's divine nature, and of his re-union with the Father from whom for the time he seems to be separated, when dwelling in the body of flesh. If we take further the teaching as we find it in the writings of S. Paul this becomes clearer and clearer as we go on: for we find him using the term "Christ," as a mystic name for the principle

¹ *S. John*, x, 34—36.

² *Ibid.*, xvii, 21, 23.

of soul developing in man, the son of the father (spirit): "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."¹ Christ is not only to be a man external to His followers. He is to be formed as the babe within the womb in the heart of every one of His disciples. And this Christ who is to be born in the disciple is to grow, is to develop within him, until at last the man has attained unto "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."² They are to become manifested Gods, they are to become Gods manifest in the flesh. That is the teaching of apostolic Christianity, so sadly mutilated in its presentation by modern writers. And it is taught that all things are to be finally merged in God. Do you suppose that the teaching of union with, of merging in, Brahman is a teaching which Christianity had not? Then turn to the 15th chapter of the *Epistle to the Corinthians* and read the description that there is given: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . The last enemy that shall be

¹ *Galatians*, iv, 19.

² *Ephesians*, iv, 13.

destroyed is death... When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."¹ Just the old teaching coming out again, "God all in all," as the last stage of the universe, the Son, the Christ, gathering up all into Himself as Ishvara, and merging into Brahman, when God is all in all.

Let us next turn to Reincarnation; that very verse just quoted that the "last enemy that shall be destroyed is death," in itself gives a hint as to the teaching of the early Church, for death is said not to be destroyed till "the end." So also is a hint in the words: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out,"² the going out being the going to rebirth, the exile from the heavenly places. But there are three cases which mark the doctrine more strongly so far as the Christ is concerned. It must be remembered that belief in reincarnation was current among the Jews of His time, so that naturally references to it would be

¹ 1 *Corinthians*, xv, 24-28

² *Revelation*, iii, 12.

intelligible to all those about Him. But this fact is not enough to show that He accepted the doctrine. So take His words when some disciples came from John the Baptist and asked Him if He were the Christ. When the messengers had received His answer for their master, Jesus spoke of the character of the great preacher, and declared: "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come"¹—a very clear statement that the Jewish prophet had reincarnated in John the Baptist. Again, when His disciples asked why it was said that Elijah would come before the Messiah, His answer was: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not . . . Then the disciples understood that he spake to them of John the Baptist."²

Again, His disciples asked Him about a blind man: "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Now a modern Christian would answer: "How could a man have committed sin before he was born, so as to bring upon himself this penalty?"

¹ *S. Matthew*, xi, 14.

² *Ibid.*, xvii, 10—13.

But Jesus made no such ignorant reply. His reply was: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."¹ He accepted the pre-existence of the soul and the possibility of sin committed before the present birth, but gave another reason for the blindness.

Turning to the fathers, we find that Tertulian speaks very plainly in his *Apology*. "If a Christian promises the return of a man from a man, and the very actual Gaius from Gaius, the cry of the people will be to have him stoned; they will not even so much as grant him a hearing. If there is any ground for the moving to and fro of human souls into different bodies [of animals], why may they not return into the very substance they have left, setting forth what is greatlier worthy of belief, that a man will come back from a man, any given person from any given person, still retaining his humanity; as that the soul, with its qualities unchanged, may be restored to the same condition though not to the same framework... You ask, shall we be always dying and

¹ S. John, ix, 2, 3.

rising up from death? If so the Lord of all things had appointed, you would have to submit... [But the millennium comes as limit and] after this there is neither death nor repeated resurrections." Origen held the belief in the pre-existence of the soul and of its being born into a body consonant with its previous deeds. He says: "Is it not more in conformity with reason that every soul, for certain mysterious reasons (I speak now according to the opinions of Pythagoras and Plato, and Empedocles, whom Celsus frequently names) is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions?"¹ Many passages might be quoted, all showing a belief in the pre-existence of the soul and of its "descent" to take birth here; and there is no doubt that this belief was very widely spread in the early Church, for at a general Council it was formally condemned and stamped as a heresy—a Council held after darkness had begun its reign. This decision, more than anything else, divorced Christianity from the other religions of the world, and led to the most disastrous consequences. For

¹ *Contra Celsum*, 1.

with the doctrine of Reincarnation went the doctrine of Karma, the two depending one upon the other, and when Reincarnation is no longer believed, Karma can no longer be taught. It was taught in the early epistles with no lack of plainness: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."¹ But when Reincarnation went, these words became unintelligible, and then all sorts of schemes had to be invented, schemes of vicarious atonement and what not, in order that men might not reap the result of their own doings. But when any such scheme is put to you by a Christian, who tells you that by that way you can escape the consequences of your actions, answer him in the words of his own Scriptures: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

A noble doctrine, the doctrine of the law of sacrifice, underlies the idea of the vicarious atonement, but it has been travestied in a way which leads to the most terrible blasphemy. The law of sacrifice which brings

¹ *Galatians*, vi, 7.

about the union of man with God, the law of sacrifice by which the worlds were made, and by which the worlds are living, that noble doctrine of antiquity is shown forth in primitive Christianity by the perfect sacrifice of the Christ to the will of God. But it comes out in mediæval Christianity in schemes which put the Son and the Father in opposition, as it were, the one to the other, and which shock all reverence as well as outrage all reason, by bringing in all kinds of legal quibbles into the relationship between the Spirit of God and man.

With the loss of Reincarnation comes into existence another doctrine, in which Christianity is unique—the doctrine of an eternal hell. Heaven and hell, equally eternal, became the outcome of one short life here. A man born into the world with his character already marked upon him, with vicious or virtuous tendencies, as the case might be, brought with him from the womb and stamped upon him in the cradle, that man, by living twenty, forty, sixty, one hundred years, was to fix the whole of his eternal destiny and go either to heaven or hell for evermore. How terribly that

doctrine worked in demoralising the minds of men, in making them selfish, I will only quote one verse to show—a verse written by one of the gentlest, noblest, purest men of modern Christianity, John Keble, the author of *The Christian Year*. He had been so demoralised by this doctrine of an eternal hell, by the idea that heaven and hell must stand or fall together, that in *The Christian Year* he gave voice to a sentiment which seems to me shocking in its selfishness and immorality; he pleaded for the doctrine of eternal torture because without it the idea of the eternal heaven would lose one of its supports. If some men are not tortured for ever, there is no proof that others will have eternal place in heaven. He says—I quote from memory, but give the gist correctly :

“ But where is then the stay of contrite hearts ?
 Of old they leant on Thine eternal word ;
 But with the sinner's fear their hope departs,
 Fast linked as Thy great name to Thee, O Lord,
 That we should endless be, for joy or woe :
 But if the treasures of Thy wrath could waste,
 Thy lovers must their promised heaven forego.”

But if it were true that life in heaven depended on the tortures of others in hell, I ask you whether any man, with the Christ-spirit in

him, would not accept annihilation for himself rather than buy his immortality by the misery of uncounted millions in a hell that knows no ending? Happily, this is a doctrine almost of the past; Christian after Christian is giving it up; teacher after teacher is proclaiming the opposite; Canon Farrar, preaching in the pulpit of Westminster Abbey, proclaimed the doctrine of "eternal hope" as against the doctrine of eternal hell, and only narrow and uncultured minds, who by the lack of the imaginative faculty are not able to realise the horrors of hell, only these continue to teach it and to make it part of Christianity.

I must go swiftly over the question whether the science of the soul is taught in Christianity. In the Roman Catholic Church, it is taught to a great extent, but not in the Protestant. I cannot tell you about the Greek Church, for I have no first-hand acquaintance with it; so that I must confine myself to the statement that in the Roman Catholic Church occultism has been to some extent preserved, and there some occult knowledge and some occult powers are still to be found. For instance, in the monastic orders methods of meditation are

taught with careful particularity ; among the monks and nuns of the contemplative orders there is a system of meditation that carries on the soul from step to step, from the first effort of imagination to the passing of the consciousness into the scene which is depicted ; here is a remnant of the science of the soul, based upon a knowledge of facts. There are other occult traces in the Roman Catholic Church ; the use of images, or idols, as Protestants call them, the use of holy water, of an ancient language—in which prayers were made by men of knowledge, the utility of prayer largely depending upon the sound which is produced. In these things are shown traces of the old teaching, based on the understanding of the invisible world. Then there is the use of relics and of prayers for the dead—all signs of occult knowledge, however fragmentary, however incomplete. And with what result ? That they have produced mystics, saints, workers of "miracles," to an extent which the other sections of the Church cannot approach, and that you find among Roman Catholics mystics who speak of union with God, and of the methods by which that union may be brought

about, on lines corresponding to the Hindu. Here again I cannot quote much, for the time is brief and the subject is long; but I may remind you of the exquisite *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, one of the most wonderful books ever produced by a Christian, a book that men of every faith might read with advantage. S. Thomas à Kempis gives instructions as to what a man must do if he would find Christ, and often the teaching is put into the mouth of Christ Himself. Take the teaching on the Self: "If man would find God he must learn," having left all things else, that "he leave also himself, and wholly go out of himself, and retain nothing of self-love."¹ A man ought "perfectly to forsake himself;"² "Son, leave thyself, and thou shalt find Me. . . Lord, how often shall I resign myself, and in what things shall I leave myself?—Always and at all times, as in little, so also in great; I make no exception, but will have thee to be found in all things divested of thyself. Otherwise how canst thou be Mine, and I thine, unless thou be both within and without freed

¹ *Op. cit.*, II, xi.

² *Ibid.*, III, xxxi.

from all self-will? ... Aim only at this, pray for this, desire this, that thou mayest be divested of all self-seeking; and thus naked, follow thy naked Jesus."¹ "A man's true progress consists in denying himself; and the man that has renounced himself is very much at liberty and very safe."² A Vedāntin might have written: 'Whatsoever is not God is *nothing*, and ought to be accounted as *nothing*."³ A man is not to be swayed by emotions, for great delight in devotion does not prove progress, but rather is it seen "in offering thyself with thy whole heart to the will of God ... so that with the same equal countenance thou continue giving thanks, both in prosperity and adversity, weighing all things in an equal balance."⁴ A pithy wisdom is found, also, that reminds one of the directness of the Buddha: "Where shall we find a man that is willing to serve God *gratis*?"⁵ "What a man cannot mend in himself and others, he must bear with patience ... endeavour to be patient

¹ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

² *Ibid.*, xxxix.

³ *Ibid.*, xxxi.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xxv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, xi.

in supporting the defects and infirmities of others, of what kind soever; because thou also hast many things which others must bear withal. If thou canst not make thyself such a one as thou wouldst, how canst thou expect to have another according to thy liking?"¹ I might mention many others, but I have no time. I have gone beyond my lawful time in my desire to make you understand something of the religion which I know is too often travestied in your minds by the narrow interpretations which are continually put upon it.

And my appeal to Christians, as to men of other religions, would be an appeal for unity, for the breaking down of divisions; why should they not come on a common platform with all the rest of the great religions of the world? Why should not this young religion, with only eighteen centuries of life behind it, come and join with Buddhism with its two thousand four hundred years of existence; with Zoroastrianism and with Hinduism, with their ten thousands and twenty thousands of years rolling backward into the past? Can they not

¹ *Ibid.*, I, xvi.

see how they blaspheme God, when they declare that He has kept Himself for only one religion amongst all religions, and that well nigh the youngest of them all? Can they not see how they outrage the Supreme, when they claim a unique platform, pushing all the rest of His children out into the darkness, unrecognised by the Father of all spirits? Is not God called the Father of all spirits, and not only of the spirits incarnated in Christian bodies? If this unity could be gained, all proselytism would cease; no man would try to convert another to his faith, but would rather try to learn what that other may have to teach him, what other views of God. For we can all learn from each other, Hindu from Christian, and Christian from Hindu; Zoroastrian from Buddhist, and Buddhist from Zoroastrian. Every religion is but one coloured ray of the light of God, and in the union of all the religions the true white light is seen. As long as we separate ourselves we are coloured by a particular ray. Let us study all religions, and love them all, and we shall then come nearer to the Fount in which we all have our origin and our ending.

You know well enough that I belong not to the religion that I here have been depicting; you know well enough that, though born in it, I was driven out of it by a narrow presentation, and knew not these truer and deeper views of that faith. But I say to you, that all these religions come from one source. Their children should live as brothers and not as enemies, and none should try to convert others, all should be treated with respect. Hatred is of evil, in whatever religion it may be found. Let each man teach his own faith to those who desire to embrace it; let every man be free to speak of his views of God to all who are willing to listen to him. We are but facets of the Eternal; our poor intellects are narrow channels, through which the life and love of God pour forth. Let us be channels in our own persons, but let us not deny that others are channels as much as we are, and that the divine life and love flow through them as well as through us. Then shall come peace, wherein division shall arise not; then shall come unity, the harmony which is greater than identity. When His children live in love, then they may hope to know something of the love

of God, for truly spake a Christian teacher :
"He that loveth not his brother whom he
hath seen, how can he love God whom he
hath not seen?"¹

¹ 1 John, iv, 20.

